

CALIFORNIA OCEAN PROTECTION COUNCIL

Staff Recommendation

May 15, 2008

**Central Coast ROV Monitoring Research Project**

File No.: 08-052-01

Project Manager: Valerie Termini

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to grant up to \$247,500 to the Institute for Fisheries Resources to provide vessel support for Remote Operated Vehicle (ROV) monitoring and other research activities in the central coast region.

**LOCATION:** Statewide

**STRATEGIC PLAN OBJECTIVE:** Research and Monitoring, and Ocean and Coastal Ecosystems

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**EXHIBITS**

Exhibit 1: [Site Map of Central Coast MPAs](#)

Exhibit 2: [Letters of Support](#)

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**RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:**

Staff recommends that the Ocean Protection Council adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 35500 *et seq.* of the Public Resources Code:

“The Ocean Protection Council hereby approves the disbursement of an amount not to exceed \$247,500 to the Institute for Fisheries Resources to provide vessel support for Remote Operated Vehicle (ROV) monitoring and related research activities in the central coast, subject to the condition that prior to disbursement of funds the Institute for Fisheries Resources (IFR) shall submit for the review and approval of the Secretary to the Council a work plan, including schedule and budget.”

Staff further recommends that the Council adopt the following findings:

“Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits, the Council hereby finds that:

1. The proposed project is consistent with the purposes of Division 26.5 of the Public Resources Code, the Ocean Protection Act.
2. The proposed is consistent with the Ocean Protection Council's project funding guidelines.”

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3. The Institute for Fisheries Resources is a California-based non-profit organization existing under the provisions of U.S. Internal Revenue Code 501(c)(3).

### **PROJECT SUMMARY:**

The project will grant funds to the Institute for Fisheries Resources (IFR) to provide one year of vessel support for ROV surveys and related activities in the central coast region in support of the Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA). Completion of these surveys will augment the ongoing central coast marine protected area (MPA) baseline data project by providing information in areas of the water column that were previously unstudied due to logistical and economic difficulty in the area. The project will focus on mid to deep water habitats beyond the range of scuba divers and in depths where manned submersibles would be financially and/or logistically impractical. By supporting this project, the Ocean Protection Council (OPC) will aid in collection of robust baseline data on abundance, size, and diversity of fish and invertebrates found in habitats within this unique depth range. These data, in conjunction with data collected through other surveys will help the Department of Fish and Game (DFG) to adaptively manage California's newly created MPAs.

This project will be undertaken collaboratively; it is anticipated that IFR will partner with Tim Maricich, a local fisherman in the central coast, to provide vessel support to conduct ROV baseline data collection for the MLPA process. This approach will help expand the scale of current monitoring efforts while lowering the overall costs of monitoring.

### **PROJECT DESCRIPTION:**

#### **Project Background**

Last year, the OPC funded the Central Coast Baseline Monitoring Project, a cooperative project between OPC, DFG, and several academic institutions in the central coast region (the OPC is being asked to continue this project for another year at this same meeting). As the Central Coast Baseline Monitoring Project was being composed, OPC and DFG staff realized that not enough funds were available to cover all priority habitats and depth ranges. A decision was made to not include the ROV surveys in the original plan because of a lack of funds for vessel support, however, DFG was going to work to find funding from another source. The additional funds requested here will provide a vessel that is appropriately outfitted for these types of surveys and that will be available for DFG staff and monitoring researchers for the MLPA on the Central Coast.

Over the last several years demand for shared research vessel time has increased while DFG and NOAA budgets have decreased. This has rapidly reduced the availability of appropriate vessels, while making scheduling for specific sampling seasons difficult. Currently, DFG staff trying to monitor MLPA data find that the availability of government agency research vessels is limiting and will not adequately support the sampling needs required for the central coast region.

The \$45,000 in yearly funds DFG have secured through Coastal Impact Assistance Program, (CIAP) for vessel support relies heavily on DFG and other agency vessel time (e.g. NOAA). Currently, 30 days of DFG enforcement vessel time is supported with CIAP funds with an

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additional 30 days assumed to be provided by other agencies such as NOAA currently at no cost. The 30 days of CIAP funded DFG enforcement vessel time assumed a daily cost of \$1,500, less than half the actual daily rate of private sector vessels. This year, for example, NOAA could only offer nine days of survey work on the R/V Fulmar for central coast monitoring due to competition with other users. More importantly, given limits to agency vessel availability, DFG now lacks the flexibility in scheduling field work that is required in the demanding ocean environments of central and northern California.

### **Project Details and Scope of Work**

If approved, the OPC will provide funds to IFR for one year for vessel support to conduct ROV surveys in the central coast region in collaboration with DFG staff. As mentioned previously, IFR anticipates working with a local fisherman, Tim Maricich who will provide up to 150 days of vessel time for DFG staff and other research collaborators. The vessel, the F/V Donna Kathleen is adequately sized and outfitted for supporting multiple research needs, with minor modifications. In addition, Mr. Maricich's expertise and familiarity with deepwater environments will play a valuable role in identifying appropriate monitoring sites within and outside of MPAs; thus increasing sampling efficiency. This project will provide DFG the needed flexibility to train staff, test and calibrate DFG's equipment, and conduct exploratory and baseline surveys as weather and sea conditions permit.

DFG will use ROVs to collect and analyze baseline data on abundance, size, and diversity of fish, and invertebrates from mid to deepwater (20 –100+ m) habitats and reference locations within a statewide network of MPAs. In conjunction with the infrastructure developed through the four years of CIAP funds, the funds requested in this project will allow the DFG to meet current sampling goals, thus enhancing critical baseline information on deepwater habitats and biodiversity for MPA assessment. In addition, the data collected will provide valuable information for adaptive fisheries and ecosystem management in addition to providing collaborating researchers shared vessel time.

Mr. Maricich is currently offering his vessel for 150 consecutive days at a rate of \$1,600 per day, including his crew and operations costs. DFG has found that this approach is far more cost effective than other lease options. The arrangement with Mr. Maricich would provide additional days for other MPA or marine management directed research in addition to the added flexibility to work around the inevitable adverse weather days that could hamper reaching the ROV sampling objectives. DFG anticipates relying on the vessel for approximately 70 days for the ROV related at-sea-operations. During the remainder of the secured vessel time (approximately 80 days) the vessel will be used for research and monitoring surveys in the central coast which will be approved by the OPC secretary and DFG staff prior to work being conducted. An additional \$30,000 will be used to upgrade the F/V Donna Kathleen with some equipment required for ROV surveys. Capital equipment purchased with state funds will be returned to DFG when the project is complete.

### **PROJECT GRANTEE:**

The Institute for Fisheries Resources (IFR) is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization with headquarters in San Francisco, California. Established in 1993 by the Pacific Coast Federation of

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Fishermen's Associations (PCFFA), IFR is responsible for carrying out the fishery research and conservation needs of working fishing men and women. IFR's mission is to protect and restore fish populations and the human economies that depend on them. By establishing alliances among fishing men and women, government agencies, and concerned citizens, IFR unites resource stakeholders, protects fish populations, and restores aquatic habitats.

### **SITE DESCRIPTION:**

The proposed project will take place along the central coast of California from Pigeon Point to Point Conception (Exhibit 1).

### **PROJECT HISTORY:**

The OPC has a history supporting projects related to the MLPA initiative. The council has previously supported the: 1) Central Coast Marine Protected Area Monitoring project with a grant of \$2,275,000 and 2) the Marine Protected Area Monitoring Enterprise through California Ocean Science Trust with a grant of \$2,000,000.

**The Central Coast Marine Protected Area Monitoring project** focused on fulfilling the immediate need for baseline monitoring for the proposed central coast MPAs. The monitoring incorporated both bio-physical and socio-economic components. Of the bio-physical monitoring, fieldwork was completed in the following priority habitats: deepwater canyon, coral and rocky reef, kelp forests, soft bottom, and rocky intertidal habitats, in addition to incorporating socio-economic research on consumptive and non-consumptive use of resources within and near MPAs. However, as mentioned above, in ROV surveys were not completed as part of the 2007 sampling season because of a lack of funds to carry out the research.

**The Marine Protected Area Monitoring Enterprise (MPAME)** was established as a three-year project to launch a monitoring program for statewide MPAs designated under the MLPA. The purpose of the enterprise is to ensure that MPA monitoring science is properly collected, managed, analyzed and disseminated. The monitoring enterprise will also communicate scientific findings to the public and to policymakers.

### **PROJECT FINANCING:**

Ocean Protection Council	\$247,500
Coastal Impact Assistance Program (CIAP)	<u>45,000</u>
<b>Total Project Cost</b>	<b>\$292,500</b>

The anticipated source of funds will be the fiscal year 2007 – 2008 appropriation from the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006 (Proposition 84). Proposition 84 authorizes the use of these funds for purposes consistent with Section 35650 of Division 26.5 of the Public Resources Code, establishing the California Ocean Protection Trust Fund (Pub. Res. Code § 75060(g)). Under Section 35650, Ocean Protection Trust Fund monies may be expended for projects authorized by the OPC that are consistent with the Ocean Protection Act (Public Resources Code Sections 35500 et seq.).

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This project is also appropriate for prioritization under the selection criteria set forth in Section 75060(g). Section 75060(g) provides that the Council will give priority to projects which will help develop scientific data needed to adaptively manage the state's marine resources and reserves.

The disbursement of OPC funds will be contingent upon CIAP approval and proof from DFG that these funds are available for this project in the summer of 2008.

### **CONSISTENCY WITH CALIFORNIA OCEAN PROTECTION ACT:**

This project is consistent the Ocean Protection Act, Division 26.5 of the Public Resources Code. Specially, Section 35650(b)(2) authorizes expenditure of Ocean Protection Trust Fund monies for projects s that:

*(F) Improve management, conservation, and protection of coastal waters and ocean ecosystems:* This project directly relates to improving the management of the central coast MPAs by providing comprehensive data (abundance, size, habitat, and diversity of marine species) on monitoring information necessary to evaluate the condition of near shore and deep water ecosystems.

*(G) Provide monitoring and scientific data to improve state efforts to protect and conserve ocean resources:* This project will directly enhance the states efforts to protect and conserve ocean resources by providing critical baseline monitoring data to enhance the effectiveness of the newly created central coast MPAs.

*(H) Protect, conserve, and restore coastal waters and ocean ecosystems:* The information collected by the project will directly relate to understanding our ocean and coastal ecosystems by providing the data necessary to adaptively manage the central coast MPAs. Funding this type of research will lead to the restoration of our ocean ecosystems for future generations.

### **CONSISTENCY WITH OPC'S STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):**

The project is consistent with Section II, Priority Goals and Objectives, Goal E (Ocean and Coastal Ecosystems), Objective 1 of the OPC Five-Year Strategic Plan (adopted by the Council in June 2006) which states that OPC should "identify and fill critical needs in executing the MLPA" and "make resources available to design and implement a comprehensive MPA monitoring program."

The project is also consistent with Section II, Priority Goals and Objectives, Goal B, Objective 2 (Research and Monitoring), which states that OPC should "support the establishment of a comprehensive monitoring program focused on Marine Protected Areas established under the Marine Life Protection Act and structured to be beneficial to other programs, including the Marine Life Management Act."

Support of this project will help meet these goals of the OPC strategic plan by providing data from the mid water habitat level that was previously unstudied due to lack of funds. This area of the water column is critical to study as it will provide important information on abundance, size

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and diversity of species living in this range. Collection of this information will help state managers adaptively manage the states newly created MPAs so that the MPAs can be managed in such a way as to provide for a healthier and more robust ocean ecosystem.

### **CONSISTENCY WITH OPC'S PROJECT FUNDING GUIDELINES:**

The proposed project is consistent with the OPC's Project Funding Guidelines adopted June 14, 2007, in the following respects:

#### **Required Criteria**

##### **Directly relate to the ocean and coast:**

The project will take place in ocean waters along the central coast of California between Pigeon Point and Point Conception.

**Support of the Public:** See letters of support (Exhibit 2)

**Greater-than-local interest:** This project will promote regional marine resource scientific research, conservation, and enhance statewide management by supporting an initial step in developing a statewide marine protected area monitoring program.

#### **Additional Criteria**

**Resolution of more than one issue:** Support of this project both increases and provides baseline data for the MLPA process in addition to education and stewardship of ocean and coastal resources. Further this kind of information will enable the state to more adaptively manage the central coast MPAs.

**Timeliness or Urgency:** Funding is need now to ensure that data can be collected during the summer and early fall seasons when weather is adequate for research. Early baseline monitoring data will be especially important in evaluating the success of these marine protected areas.

**Coordination:** This contract will involve coordination between the OPC, DFG and IFR as well as other state agencies.

### **CONSISTENCY WITH OPC'S 2007/2008 FUNDING PRIORITIES**

#### **Enhance the capacity of government programs to meet the goals of COPA:**

This project directly meets goals of COPA those include: Chapter 4 section: (E) Improve management, conservation, and protection of coastal waters and ocean ecosystems, and (F) Provide monitoring and scientific data to improve state efforts to protect and conserve ocean resources.

#### **Develop practical approaches to implementing ecosystem-based management:**

This project will help implement aspects of eco-system based management by providing baseline MPA information that will be able to be used in an adaptive management approach to create and maintain meaningful MPAs to enhance marine wildlife.

#### **Improve the scientific understanding of our ocean resources:**

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This project will enhance our understanding of ocean resources and provide information on what type of habitat, species abundance, size, and diversity which will be necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of individual MPAs and the network of MPAs in achieving the goals of the MLPA and specific regional objectives.

### **Improve the quantity and quality of ocean and coastal habitat:**

By support of this project the OPC will be providing support for research that will lead to an enhanced ocean environment. By providing data on MPAs in the central coast the OPC will be providing valuable information on the MPAs and allow for adaptive management of the MPAs.

### **Increase healthy ocean and coastal wildlife populations and communities:**

Support of this project will lead to increased ocean health and coastal wildlife populations and communities by providing data that will allow for enhanced management of the MPAs designated by the MLPA initiative.

### **Promote ocean and coastal awareness and stewardship:**

Support of this project includes involving a local non profit, the Institute for Fisheries Resources (IFR), participate in the process of collaborative fisheries research collection. This type of project will bridge gaps between scientists and fishermen by sharing knowledge and working together. Such a project will increase stewardship of the MPAs and foster collaboration between formerly opposing factions of the MLPA process.

## **COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA**

The proposed project is categorically exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA") pursuant to 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15306 because the project involves only data collection, research and resource evaluation activities strictly for information gathering purposes that will not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource. Staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon approval by the council.